

LEARNfest 2017
University of Waikato

Student engagement: Potential causes and solutions

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We have student disengagement problems

- Ghosts
- Poor attendance
- Partial and non-completion of assessment
- Many students are not making time to take study seriously
- A regular part of our jobs has become chasing students up because they don't come to class, they miss deadlines, or they haven't even taken the time to look at the paper outline
- We are enabling this



Is disengagement getting worse?

- I don't know... but it doesn't matter that much
- Student engagement *could be much better* – I know it because I've seen it

Issue	UoW	CSUS
Ghosts	5-10%	~0%
Average attendance in class (second half)	35-70%	70-90%
Pass rates	70-85%	80-95%

- Pressures on students are similar, but students at CSUS get more advising and have more direction
- Pressures on lecturers quite different: no EFTS or pass-rate pressure

Pressures on lecturers: Get more EFTS

University to lecturers:

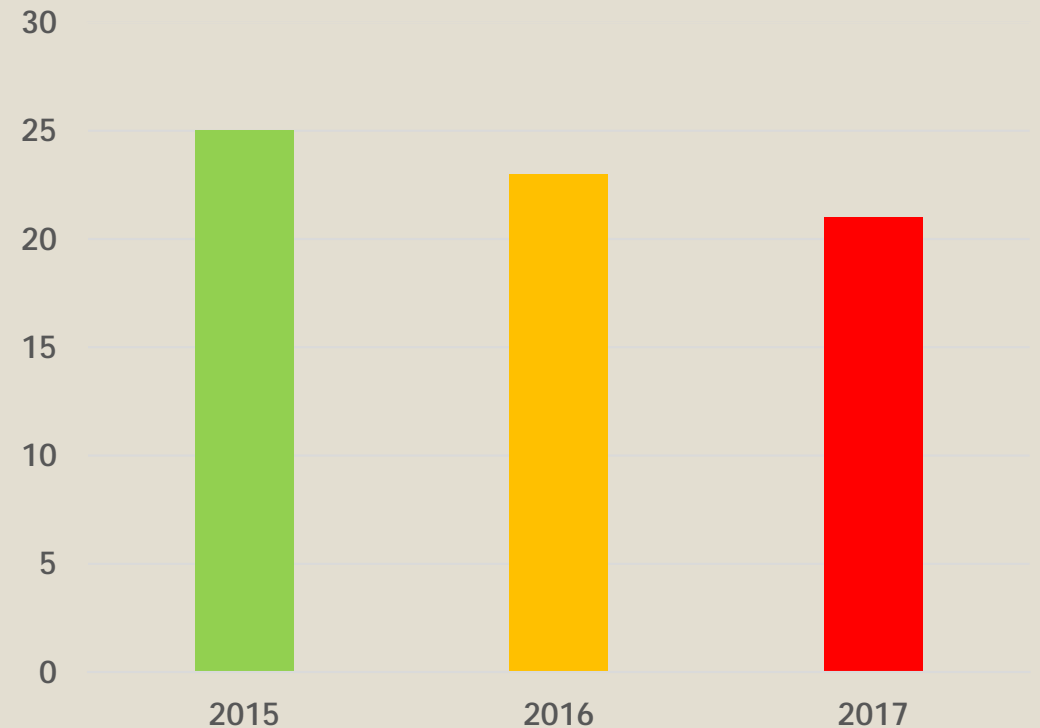
- Teach 25 students per year or risk losing your job

Result:



- Don't auto un-enroll disengaged and ghost students in second week

EFTS per lecturer



Pressures on lecturers: Must pass 60%+

Government to university:

- Pass 60% or more students per class or pay back the 3/4 (soon to be 4/4?) government funding

Result:



- Chase up and go easy on disengaged students



- Make courses easier



Pressures on lecturers: Flexible learning

Students & Government to university:

- Provide more flexible learning options to students

Result:

- Students more exposed to distractions, bad habits, weakness of will



Pressures on lecturers: Get students “work-ready”

Government to university:

- Ensure graduates are “work-ready”

Result:

- Reinforcement of the notion that higher learning is only good for getting a job, as opposed to also being a better person and citizen



Pressures on lecturers: Leaning outcomes

Everyone to lecturers (including themselves):

- Set reasonable learning outcomes and ensure that students achieve them

Result:



- Causes conflict with other pressures



Pressures on students: Too many options, no direction

Parents to students:

- You can do anything
- Pick a path and study hard

Result:



- Hard to know what to do



- Hard to be motivated to do well or learn lots when you don't see the point of either



Pressures on students: Not trying seems to work so far

Lecturers to students:

- This was very poor work, 50% C
- You should fail, but I'll give you one last chance

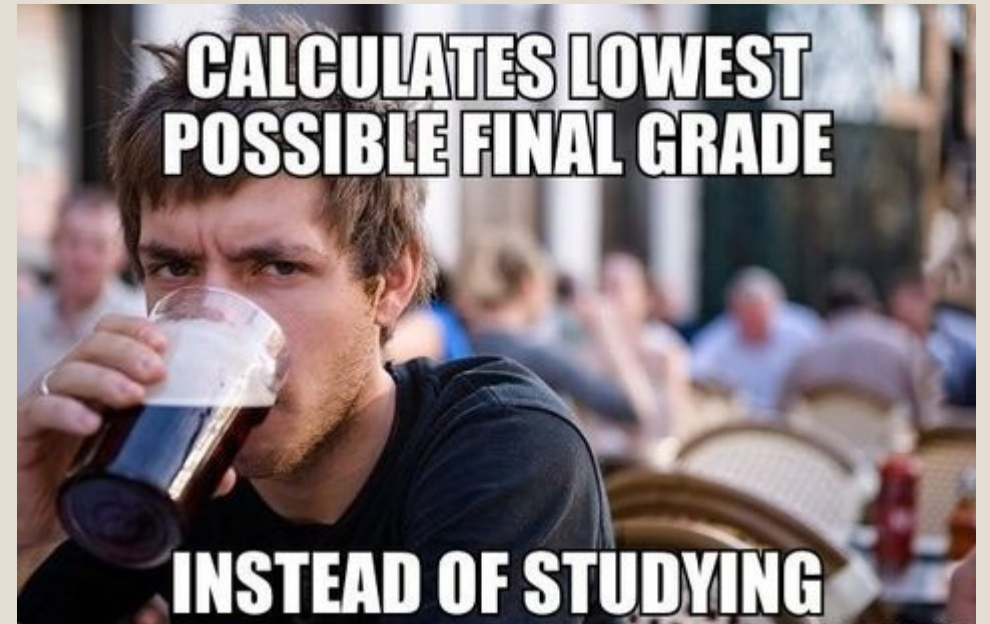
Result:



- Submit substandard work late



- Don't submit small assignments



Pressures on students: Getting a job is the point... now there's no point!

Parents to students:

- You need a degree to get a good job

Top employers (recently) :

- You don't need a degree to work for us

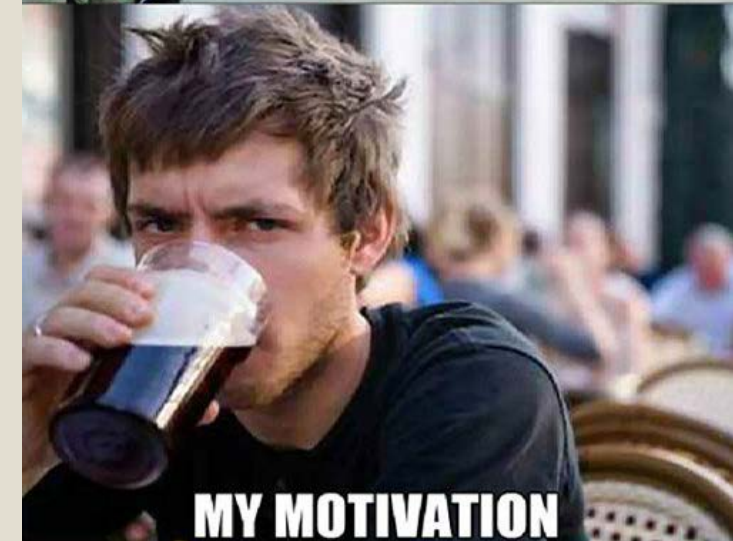
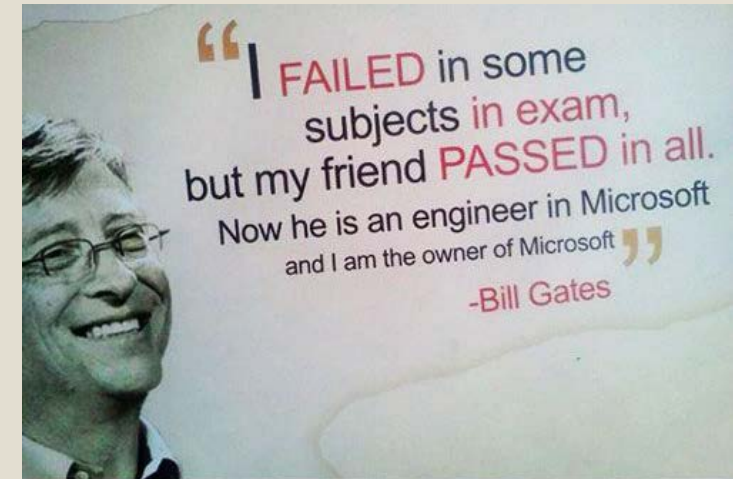
Result:



- I just need to pass



- Why am I even here anymore??!!



Pressures on students: Shiny things

Internet/games to students:

- Look at me

Part-/full-time job to students:

- You HAVE to come in today

Family to students:

- We need you to...

Result:

- ☹️ ◦ Not studying because of doing other things
- ☹️ ◦ Not being able to focus on one thing for more than 10 minutes



Summary of Pressures

Pressures on universities and lecturers to...

- Make courses easy but rigorous to ensure students learn and pass
- Take away incentives for student self motivation and accountability by encouraging chasing up, leniency, and a “just for getting a job” mentality about university education

Pressures on students to...

- Treat university like an efficiency challenge: how to pass with the least work
- And, now, maybe not even care about passing!

Potential solutions

- A university-wide initiative
 - Led by the CTTL, PVC T&L, and DVC Academic, and
 - Enforced by deans and heads of schools
- To design and teach our courses more effectively,
 - E.g. other speakers and my presentation tomorrow on reading
- Have higher expectations of students,
 - But give them realistic amounts of work and make them fully accountable for it
- And educate students about "how to do university"
 - Goal setting and priority management as part of it
 - Incorporated into degree structures by deans and academic/curriculum committees

This might reinvigorate the student body and improve outcomes for students, the university, and taxpayers.

